

PURPOSEFUL REPETITION: content words, cohesion, unity

What is “Cohesion”?

The dictionary definitions include phrases like “the state of sticking together” and “uniting together tightly.” In terms of writing, one definition states that cohesion is “The property of unity in a written text that is created by links among its surface elements, as when words in one sentence are repeated in another.” So, cohesion is the elements of a paper that hold it together—such as repeated words, phrases, and ideas—and make it feel “whole.” In other words, cohesive writing techniques and devices are the “glue” that unifies the ideas in a paper.

Cohesion is important because even if you have the greatest, most insightful ideas in the world, and your sentences are written beautifully, if you do not bother to connect your ideas, your reader will likely lose interest. Providing transitions depends on your attitude and approach as a writer: you must never assume that your reader knows what you know. In fact, it’s a good idea to assume not only that readers need all the information that you have and need to know how you arrived at the conclusion you have, but also that they are not as quick or smart as you are.

Think about transitions like crossing a stream: *you* might be able to leap from one side of the stream to the other without falling in, but you must believe that your readers need some stepping stones to help them safely get across. Remember to place these stones in strategic and visible spots. Below are some strategies for creating and placing those stepping stones

Three Types of Cohesion: Using Language to Guide Your Reader

- Use language techniques—repetition of words, phrases, and ideas—to guide your reader from one idea to the next
- Guiding language helps the reader to see the connections between your sentences and paragraphs, your thesis and supporting points.
- This is also called “flow”; flow is when your use of language signals the organization and connection of ideas. A paper that flows is cohesive.

Your words should help the reader to...

- see the relationship between your thesis and supporting points
- understand how the paragraphs relate to each other
- follow ideas easily within paragraphs; know how sentences relate to each other

Basically, guiding language...

- 1) Reminds the reader of the larger goal of the paper (the thesis)
- 2) The specific focus of the section and/or paragraph
- 3) Uses transition words to show relationships between sentences

COHESION: overall (thesis development)

- Key words/terms from your thesis are repeated throughout the paper
- Main point of the thesis—or your attitude toward the topic—is restated periodically
- Supporting points are restated in new words in topic sentences. (Don’t just repeat the exact phrases from your thesis because this comes off as lazy writing and poor use of repetition).

COHESION: between paragraphs

- Sentences at the ends of paragraphs connect with sentences at the beginnings of paragraphs—concluding sentences connect with topic sentences—through the use of transition words and repeated ideas/concepts.

COHESION: between sentences (within paragraphs)

- Transition words and phrases connect ideas from sentence to sentence (see handout on transitions)
- Sentences to signal the structure of a paragraph (i.e. *There are three main types of...*, *This can be accomplished by five methods...*, *One can complete this process in two different ways...*, etc.). Then you go on to list the three main types, five method, two different ways, and so on.
- Sentences that suggest sequence (i.e. *first, second, third, last*, etc.). Don't overuse this technique though; it can become boring and repetitive.

Identify and find the guiding (cohesive) language in the following examples (from a paper on child labor in Latin America)

Thesis statement:	<i>Three major factors lead to the prevalence of child labor in Latin America: family values, the dependent relationship many Latin nations have with developed countries, and economic globalization.</i>
Topic sentence for 1 st body paragraph:	<i>The first factor is the belief by many Latin American people that expecting all family members, including children, to work is acceptable or needed for their living.</i>
Topic sentence for 2 nd body paragraph:	<i>Another factor involves the international relationship among developed and developing nations, which intensifies the need for children to work.</i>
Topic sentence for 3 rd body paragraph:	<i>The third factor that results in child labor is the influence of multinational corporations in Latin America.</i>

Identify the links between ideas in the following sentences, which are the concluding sentences and topic sentences from two sequential paragraphs. Also, where is the new idea introduced (the topic of the next paragraph)?

(1) Concluding sentences:	<i>Basically, heroes live for ideals and their principles function as a catalyst that motivates society. However, sometimes a hero's ideals conflict with some members of society.</i>
Topic sentence of next paragraph:	<i>Because heroes must often face some opposition to their ideals and their effort to change society, they must also be brave, a second characteristic of heroes.</i>
(2) Concluding sentences:	<i>Haggarty asserts that heredity studies prove that human bodyweight is influenced by genetic factors. Research on adopted children shows that most of the adopted children follow the pattern of weight gain of their biological parents rather than their adopted parents.</i>
Topic sentence of next paragraph:	<i>Have a genetic make up to gain weight does not, however, mean that somebody is automatically obese. The environment, a person's eating habits, and the amount of physical activity play a significant role in the amount of weight a person gains.</i>

Compare the two paragraphs below.

Underline all of the cohesive and transitional devices that you can find in the revision, including restated key words, transition words, and parallel structures.

Original:

The ancient Egyptians were masters of preserving dead people's bodies by making mummies of them. Mummies several thousand years old have been discovered nearly intact. The skin, hair, teeth, fingernails and toenails, and facial features of the mummies were evident. It is possible to diagnose the disease they suffered in life, such as smallpox, arthritis, and nutritional deficiencies. The process was remarkably effective. Sometimes apparent were the fatal afflictions of the dead people: a middle-aged king died from a blow on the head, and polio killed a child king. Mummification consisted of removing the internal organs, applying natural preservatives inside and out, and then wrapping the body in layers of bandages.

Revised:

The ancient Egyptians were masters of preserving dead people's bodies by making mummies of them. In short, mummification consisted of removing the internal organs, applying natural preservatives inside and out, and then wrapping the body in layers of bandages. And the process was remarkably effective. Indeed, mummies several thousand years old have been discovered nearly intact. Their skin, hair, teeth, fingernails and toenails, and facial features are still evident. Their diseases in life, such as smallpox, arthritis, and nutritional deficiencies, are still diagnosable. Even their fatal afflictions are still apparent: a middle-aged king died from a blow on the head; a child king died from polio.

The paragraph is now much more coherent. Notice that writer has not only adjusted the organization of the information, she has also created links—using a variety of methods—between sentences help readers move easily from one idea to the next.

Adapted in part from: Dollahite, Nancy E. and Julie Haun. Sourcework. USA: Thomson-Heinle, 2006; "Coherence: Transitions between Ideas." Guide to Grammar and Writing. 1996. 18 March 2009.
<<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/transitions.htm>>.